FRANK FRAZETTA'S

DARK KINGDOM™

$3.99 US
PART 4
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DARK KINGDOM

PART 4

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WOLVES GO HUNGRY ON THE HIGH PLAINS OF BLEAK VIKAVIA. THE SNOW THERE NEVER MELTS AND PREY IS SCARCE.

STARVATION BREEDS DESPERATION.

DESPERATION PUSHES A CREATURE PAST THE BOUNDARIES OF CAUTION...THE LIMITS OF REASON.

AND WITHOUT REASON...

YIIIE!

WHUNKK

YIIP!

YIIIKE!

...UNNATURAL DEEDS ARE DONE.

BUT VEDDRA, WHAT OF RED MORDEN!?

YOU SPOKE TRUE, GHURRD! HE IS A RESTLESS ONE.

IF IT'S MORE OF MORDEN'S SAGA YOU'D HEAR BOY, THEN LISTEN CLOSE, AS THE REAVER'S FATE GREW GRIMMER BY THE MOMENT.

HE HAD GONE SEEKING DARKNESS...AND 'TWAS DARKNESS HE FOUND!

SWALLOWED BY THE SANDS ON THE ISLE OF THORNS, MORDEN FOUND HIMSELF SURROUNDED BY A HOWLING VOID. THE STATUE BEAST HAD GONE, LOSING ITS GRIP ON THE BERSERKER AS DARK MAGICKS TURNED IT TO RUBBLE.

STILL...HORRORS APLENTY AWAITED MORDEN IN THAT VASTNESS. HORRORS NOT OF THE EYE...BUT OF THE MIND.

HE SAW HIMSELF DOOMED. ADRIFT ON AN ENDLESS SEA WITH A SHADOWED CREW OF LOST SOULS AT HIS BACK...

HE SAW HIMSELF DAMNED, SIRE TO A FAMILY OF THE DEAD...

...AND HIS OWN BONES, TAINTED BY EVIL AND BLEACHING IN THE SUN.

THE VISIONS WERE RELENTLESS, ENDLESS...AND THEY ALL SHARED A COMMON HORROR...

THROUGH ALL HIS HELL-BORN NIGHTMARES... HE HAD A GUIDE.

YOU!

WHO ARE YOU? WHY DO YOU PLAGUE MY MIND AND WHERE DO YOU ROW!?

FRANK FRAZETTA'S

DARK KINGDOM

CHAPTER 4: RED LIFE-BLACK DEATH

YET ANOTHER ISLE OF THE DAMNED. TELL ME THEN, DEVIL... WERE MY VISIONS TRUE?

AM I DEAD?

NO WORDS, THEN? JUST A BONY FINGER POINTING ME TO MY FATE. SO BE IT.

I WILL SHOW YOU HOW A VIKAVIAN ARRIVES IN HELL!

YOU THERE! WHAT IS THIS PLACE? IS THIS HEL–?

I WAITED FOR YOU MOR-DANN...

LHIANNA?

THIS IS A LONELY PLACE, MOR-DANN...A PLACE FOR WARRIOR DEAD. I WAITED FOR YOU, WAITED TO CROSS...

BUT SHE'D WAITED IN VAIN! YOU SEE, MORDEN WAS NOT DEAD. OH, HE THOUGHT HE'D SHED HIS MORTAL COIL, BUT HIS OWN HEARTBEAT BETRAYED HIM. LHIANNA HEARD IT TOO...LIKE THUNDER IN HER EARS. AND SHE WEPT AT THE SOUND.

THAT, MY YOUNG FINN... IS LOVE. AND LOVE CAN MAKE SOMEONE WISH FOR... AYE, AND EVEN DO... THE UNNATURAL.

SOMETIMES, THE THINGS WE DO, OR SET IN MOTION IN THE NAME OF LOVE ARE QUESTIONABLE TO THOSE WHO BEAR WITNESS TO THEM.

AND SOMETIMES, GIVEN TIME AND HINDSIGHT...

WHIINE!

...EVEN ONE WHO HAS ACHIEVED THE IMPOSSIBLE...

...MAY LIVE TO QUESTION THE RIGHTNESS OF HIS DEEDS.

CROSS!? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

NO! STAND AWAY, RED MOR-DANN! THERE IS A BALANCE TO THIS REALM... A BALANCE THAT YOU WOULD SHATTER WITH THE QUICKENING OF YOUR HEART AND THE RASP OF YOUR BREATH!

LHIANNA! YOU'RE SPEAKING MADNESS! LET ME...

ONLY THE DEAD MAY CROSS!

THE BRIDGE, MOR-DANN! IT LEADS TO THE CITADEL OF THE SLAIN, WHERE ALL THINGS THAT ENTER THIS REALM GO! I WAITED FOR YOU...

BUT YOUR PULSE IS A BLASPHEMY IN THIS PLACE!

'TIS TRUE THAT LHIANNA HAD AWAITED MORDEN IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD. HER TIME THERE MUST HAVE SEEMED LIKE AN ETERNITY...

BUT SHE NEEDN'T HAVE FELT SO ALONE. FOR ANOTHER HAD SENSED THE THREAT TO THE BALANCE 'TWEEN THE REALMS OF LIFE AND DEATH...

LHIANNA, I--

AND HIS WAIT WAS OVER.

KRAKOOM!

DEVILS OF HELL!

ACROSS AGADAH, ALL THE PEOPLES KNOW HIS NAME, YET ONLY A BRAVE FEW DARE SPEAK IT.

ON THAT DREAD BEACH, LHIANNA'S SPIRIT JOINED THEIR RANKS AS HER FEAR LENT HER ITS VOICE.

THE DEATH DEALER!

KERRANG

UHHHN!

WELL-LANDED, DARK RIDER! A BLOW TO SHATTER THE ARM! I'VE HEARD YOUR DREAD SAGAS, MAN-KILLER...LET US PUT THEM TO THE TEST AND SEE...

...WHO IS UNSTOPPABLE!

SPANNG

SHUNK

YEEE-AAGH!

GODS! DO YOU NOT BLEED!?

...YOU MUST STAND...

SHSSH

STILL... YOU'VE LOST YOUR AXE, SO...

...DOWN.

YAAAAAHH!

SKRAAANG

DAMN! YOUR PRESENCE HERE WAS FORESEEN, BUT SO SOON?

YOU'RE RUINING EVERYTHING, DARK RIDER!

CLAANG

THRAAK

GAAH!

HMMM...

YES, YOU'LL DO. THE DEATH DEALER RESPECTS BALANCE, SO IN LIGHT OF RED MORDEN'S OBVIOUS HUMAN FRAILTY, PERHAPS WE'LL TIP THE SCALES A BIT.

HA-HA-HA!

SKRAAK!

RRAAAWW! HISSS!

WHAT?

MAGGOT-SPAWN!

URRR!

HISSS!

GETTING TIRED, SLAUGHTERER? I DOUBT IT. COME ON THEN...I'VE FACED HORRORS GREATER THAN YOU ON THIS MADMAN'S QUEST, AND I'LL...

GRRAWL

SLUTCH!

SKLUTCH!

THEN, YOUNG FINN, DID THE UNDERWORLD WITNESS A BATTLE THE LIKES OF WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE!
THE WINGED BERSERKER AND THE HORNED REAPER, SIDE BY SIDE, FORCES JOINED BY NECESSITY, MINDS AND EYES GONE RED WITH MURDEROUS FURY...
...AND AXE-BLADES DRUNK WITH THE COLD BLOOD OF THE DEAD!

SKUTTCH

YAAAHHH!

THE BATTLE RAGED THUS...

COME FORTH, CARRION! I'VE BLADE ENOUGH FOR...

...ALL.

...UNTIL IT WAS DONE.

SO HORROR... WE'VE BESTED THE ROTTING HOARD.

WHAT OF OUR OWN CONFLICT? SHALL WE CALL IT...

...A DRAW...?

SLI'ISH SHWIP

SO BE IT.

EEYAAAH!

KERANG

WHUDD

UHCK!!

THWAMM

A MOMENT- KOFF! DEVIL...LET ME FIND MY LEGS... AND I'LL...

BUT KNOW THIS! COMING HERE WAS NOT MY CHOICE! 'TWAS MERELY THE NEXT STEP IN A QUEST FOR LOVE...FOR LIFE! SO DO YOUR WORS...!

SHUNKK

HOW...!?

I...UHN... SEE. YOU'VE NO MORE TASTE FOR BATTLE THEN.

COME AHEAD, MONSTER. IT'S TRUE I'M A TRESPASSER IN THIS LAND OF BONES. YOU'RE JUSTIFIED...

WHUNNK

LHIANNA... YOU CAME BACK!

QUICKLY! WHILE HE'S DISTRACTED!

NOW MOR-DANN!

SHLIK

BEGONE, DEMON!

LHIANNA! YOU'VE DONE IT! AGAIN, WITH YOUR BOW, YOU'VE...

I'VE DONE NOTHING SAVE SLOW HIM DOWN. MAKE HASTE, FOR HE WILL BE AT YOUR HEELS AGAIN SOON.

THAT IS THE LAST THAT MY BOW OR I CAN DO FOR YOU, MOR-DANN. YOU BELONG TO THE WORLD OF THE LIVING...AND I CAN WAIT FOR YOU NO LONGER.

MORDEN STOOD FOR A MOMENT ON THE BRIDGE, HEAD HUNG IN PAIN AND SHAME AS HE WATCHED HER GO. SHE HAD SAVED HIM, LOVED HIM...BUT SHE WAS NO LONGER A PART OF HIS WORLD AND HE HAD NO DESIRE TO RUSH TOWARD HERS.

HE BREATHED NO EASIER AT THE BRIDGE'S FAR END. HE PAUSED, FIGHTING PAIN FROM HIS SUNDERED RIBS AND THE HOT STING OF LHIANNA'S WORDS IN HIS HEART AS HE STARED...

...IN AWE AND HORROR AS THE ONLY LIVING MAN TO EVER LOOK UPON THE CITADEL OF THE SLAIN.

HE SWALLOWED HIS FEAR, AS HE ALWAYS HAD...

...MORDEN MADE HIS WAY TO THE HEART OF THE LEERING DOME.

YOU!

...AND ENTERED THE CITADEL UN-BURDENED, ARMED WITH HIS AXE AND THE CLEAR SIGHT BESTOWED ON HIM BY HIS LOST WIFE...

AH, THE CRIMSON REAVER! YOU ARE INDEED IMPRESSIVE VIKAVIAN, PASSING THE DARK ONE AND AN ARMY OF THE DEAD. DO YOU KNOW HOW LUCKY YOU ARE? LUCKY...BUT UNFORTUNATELY... TOO LATE!

DAMN YOUR EYES, MAN! UNHAND THE ***BLACK ROSE!*** I KNOW NOT HOW IT CAME TO REST HERE, BUT...

WE ARE AT THE HEART OF THIS REALM, FOOL! ANYONE... AND ANYTHING THAT ENTERS ITS DREAD BORDERS ENDS UP HERE!

JUST AS YOU HAVE.

ONE SUCH AS ME? ***HA!*** IT IS ONE SUCH AS ***YOU*** ON WHICH THE POWER OF THE IRON ROSE WOULD BE WASTED, BARBARIAN.

BRING IT TO ME! I'VE TRAVELLED TOO FAR, FACED TOO MUCH TO LOSE THE ROSE TO ONE SUCH AS YOU! YOU HAVE TO CLIMB DOWN SOMETIME AND...

AS FAR AS CLIMBING DOWN... I THINK NOT. THERE ARE OTHER MEANS OF EXITING THIS MORBID PLACE. AFTER ALL, THIS IS AN ISLAND, SURROUNDED BY A SEA...

...AND THE SEAS, ALL OF THEM, ARE MINE TO COMMAND.

AS THE SEA-WITCH'S VOICE SHED ITS GUTTERAL DISGUISE, HER SHRIEKS ROSE...OVER THE ROAR OF THE INVADING BRINE.

WITCH!

SPOOSH

MMM, THE POWER IS INTOXICATING, RED MORDEN! IN THE HANDS OF THOSE MAD CULTISTS, THE MAGICK IN THESE PETALS WILL FEED ME FOR DECADES! AND YOU WOULD WASTE IT ON THE RESURRECTION OF A PEASANT GIRL!

DAMNABLE HARPIE! I'VE WALKED THROUGH *HELL* FOR THAT BLACK BLOOM AND I'LL...!

YOU'LL DO NOTHING, PIRATE... SAVE RETURN TO YOUR BLEAK, ICY HOMELAND, YOUR DEAD WIFE AND YOUR WASTREL'S LIFE OF BLOOD AND MAYHEM.

AAGGH!

SHOOSH

FAREWELL, SEA-RAIDER. THANK YOUR BROODING, BARNACLED GOD THAT CARCERA HAS SHOWN YOU MERCY. MY THANKS FOR DISTRACTING THE DEATH DEALER!

NOW CEASE YOUR STRUGGLING AS MY WATERS HEAL YOUR WOUNDS...AND LOOK FOR ME NOT WITH EYES OF VENGEANCE, O' MAN...

LEST YOU STILL FIND YOUR DEATH, BENEATH THE COLD WAVES.

SKRAAAK

THE DREAD RIDER COULD BUT WATCH, AS MORDEN WAS WHISKED AWAY ONCE AGAIN BY THE WITCH'S FLUME.

WHERE *NEXT*, VEDDRA? DID CARCERA SEND MORDEN TO ANOTHER MONSTROUS SHORE?

ANOTHER SHORE? AYE, YOUNG FINN... BUT THIS TIME, ONE MORE FAMILIAR.

VIKAVIA, THE FOLLOWING MORN...

JALLAK! COME QUICKLY! IT'S RED MORDEN!

EH... MORDEN?

MORDEN!!

RED MORDEN OR I'M DAMNED!

JALLAK...

RED MORDEN LIVES! *HA!* I KNEW THE NETHERWORLD WOULD SPIT YOU OUT, YOU BLASPHEMOUS DEVIL! GODS, BUT IT IS GOOD TO LOOK UPON YOUR...

JALLAK... I FAILED.

FAILED? *HAH!* RED MORDEN DOES NOT *FAIL!*

THE TALISMAN... THE IRON ROSE... I LOST IT.

THAT MAY BE SO, REDBEARD! BUT I DID NOT! I LIBERATED *TWO* OF THOSE LOATHSOME PETALS FROM THE BEACH A YEAR AGO AND I...

A *YEAR!?* I'VE BEEN GONE A *YEAR!?* GODS, JALLAK, I...

BRYNNA..?

BRYNNA!!

WAIT MORDEN! THERE IS SOMETHING YOU MUST KNOW! BRYNNA WAS WITH-CHILD WHEN THE DRAGON SLEW HER...

BUT SHE AND THE BABE...

BRYNNA! GODS OF THE SEA, CAN IT BE YOU? YOUR HAIR...

HELLO HUSBAND.

GREAT NYROR... IF THIS BE BUT A DREAM, WAKE ME NOT!

WAAAAHH!!

AND A SON! THE FIFTH CHILD! I KNEW YOUR VISIONS WOULD NOT PLAY ME FALSE!

GAHH! FEEL THAT WIND! SO COLD...AS IF THE DARKNESS IS COMING EARLY!

YOU MAY BE RIGHT, BOY.

AND IF YOU ARE...GODS HELP US ALL.

WHAT WAS IT VEDDRA? WHAT HELD SUCH FEAR FOR BOLD JALLAK?!

YOUR GREAT, GREAT GRANDFATHER WAS A GREAT MANY THINGS, BOY. HE'D BEEN A WARRIOR, A COWARD AND WITH HIS RED BLADE ON THE ISLE OF THORNS...HE'D BECOME A WARRIOR AGAIN.

STILL, EVEN A BOLD BERSERKER IS WISE ENOUGH TO KNOW THE CRAWLING DREAD OF DARK MAGICK WHEN HE FEELS IT, EH GHURRD?

AYE VEDDRA. I'VE FELT THE TOUCH OF DARKNESS AND KNOW IT...

I KNOW IT ALL TOO WELL.

YOUR GRANDFATHER KNOWS THE REST, YOUNG ONE.

I SUSPECT HE'LL FINISH THE TALE HIMSELF WHEN YOU'RE OLDER, PERHAPS AFTER YOUR TURN ON THE PROVING ISLE...

WHAT NEXT, VEDDRA?! WHAT OF MORDEN AND HIS STRANGE, RISEN WIFE?

YOU'LL TELL HIM NOW, WOMAN!

HE'S OLD ENOUGH...AND SO AM I. NYROR ALONE KNOWS HOW MANY WINTERS I HAVE LEFT...

VERY WELL...

AND I'LL NOT SADDLE THE BOY WITH HIS FAMILY'S DARK RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF THE WHOLE OF IT!

JALLAK WATCHED AS MORDEN TOOK HIS FAMILY HOME. DARK WARNINGS DIED ON HIS LIPS AND HE STOOD HELPLESS, UNABLE TO UTTER A WORD.

THEY REMAINED INSIDE, UNSEEN FOR THE REST OF THE DAY. THE VILLAGERS KEPT THEIR DISTANCE, RESPECTING MORDEN'S PRIVACY AND THE PAIN OF HIS QUEST.

THAT NIGHT, A TERRIBLE STORM LASHED THE COAST, AND **STRANGE** WINTER LIGHTNING TORE THE SKY!

OUR PEOPLE HUDDLED IN THEIR HOMES, CRINGING FROM THE HORRORS OF THE TEMPEST OUTSIDE...

...BUT THE REAL HORROR LAY INSIDE. INSIDE THE HUT OF BRYNNA AND RED MORDEN...

KRA-KOOM

WAAAHH!

AND INSIDE THE CRUEL, CURVED SHAPE OF A DEADLY SNOW-ADDER'S FANG...ITS POISON SAC STILL INTACT.

WITH THE DAWN, A GRIM TOKEN PLACED NEAR THE BEACH LEFT NO DOUBT AS TO THE NIGHT'S DARK MURDER.

AND THE MISSING BOAT AT THE PIER..ALONG WITH THE TRAIL OF FROZEN, BLOODY FOOTPRINTS LEADING TO IT, LEFT NO MYSTERY AS TO WHOSE HAND HAD HELD THE BLADE.

SHE KILLED HIM?

AYE, SON. BUT 'TWAS NOT BRYNNA. NOT TRULY. IT WAS THE THING THAT HAD RISEN FROM THE SNOWS AT THE CALL OF THE BLACK FLOWER.

C-CAN YOU TELL ME ONE THING MORE?

I CAN TRY, BOY...

W-WILL VIKAVIA SEE THE LIKES OF A HERO LIKE RED MORDEN EVER AGAIN?

I CANNOT SAY FOR CERTAIN, FINN. BUT MORDEN WAS ONE TO ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE. AND WHEN THE DARK WINDS OF MAGICK BLOW ACROSS THE BRUMAL AND THE EBON SAILS OF OUR ENEMIES DOT THE HORIZON...

WHO'S TO SAY THAT THE IMPOSSIBLE WON'T NEED DOING ONCE AGAIN...AND A HERO BE REBORN?

THE END

FRANK FRAZETTA'S

DARK KINGDOM™

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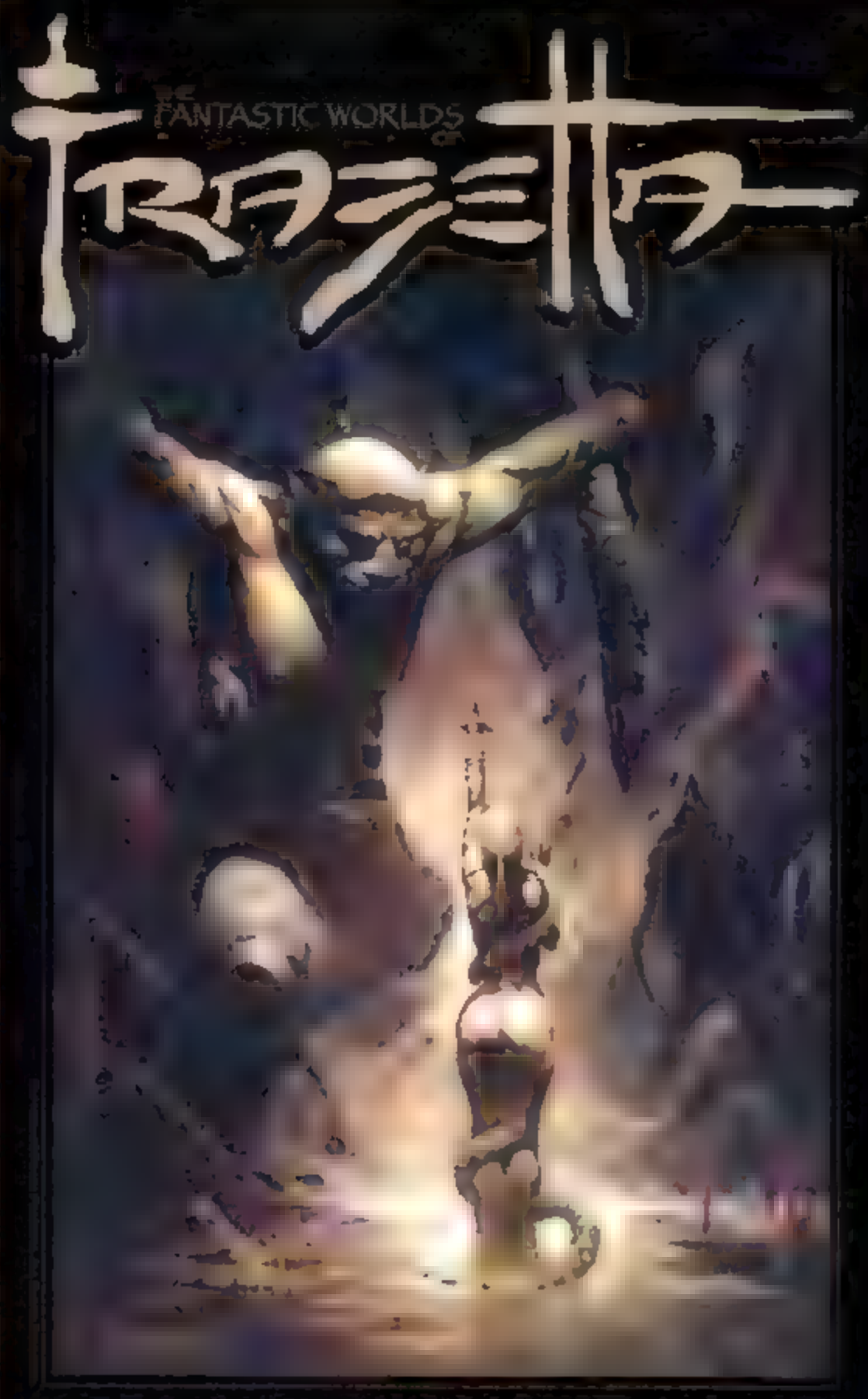

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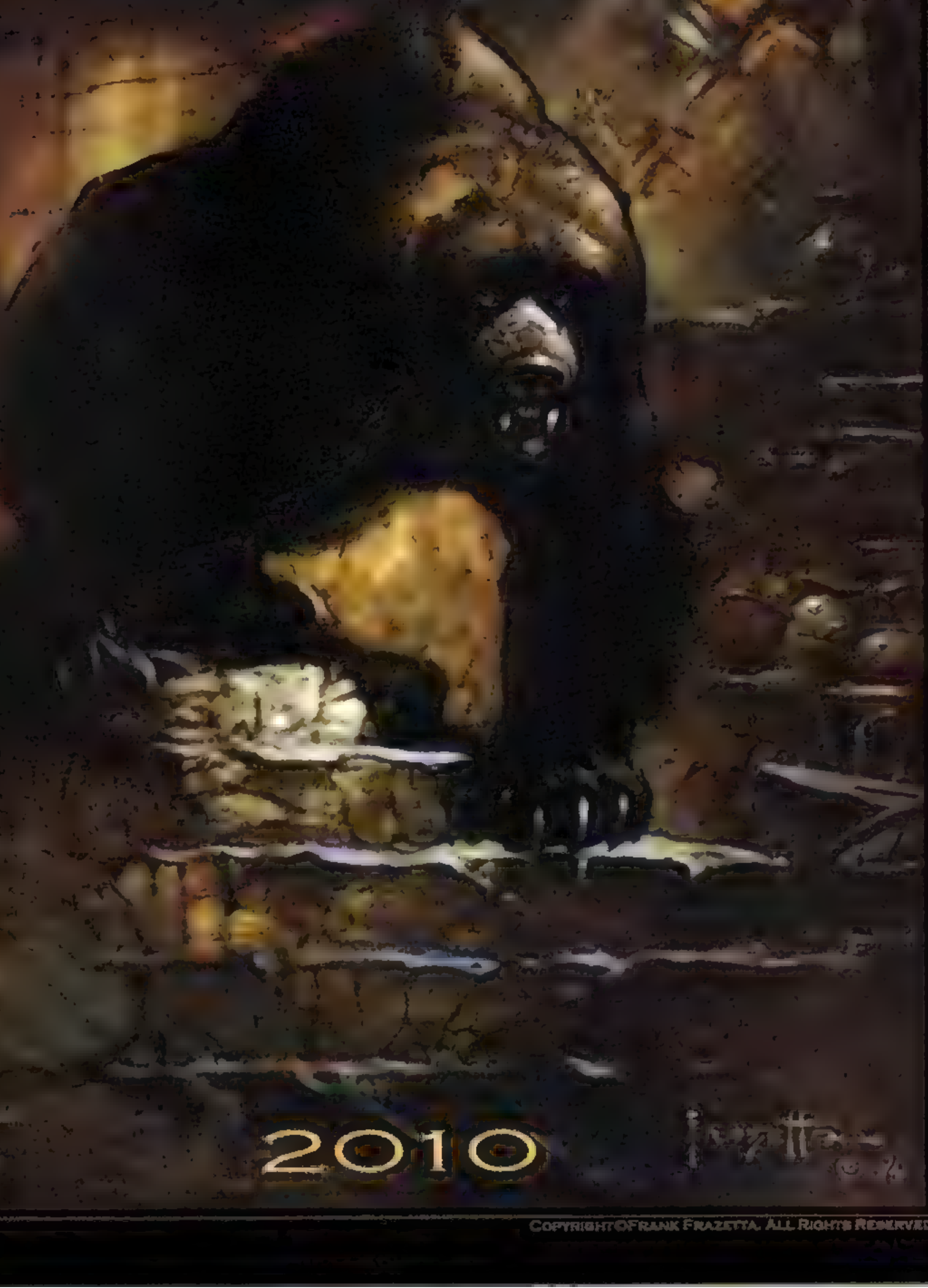

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MARK KIDWELL
JEFF ZORNOW
2010

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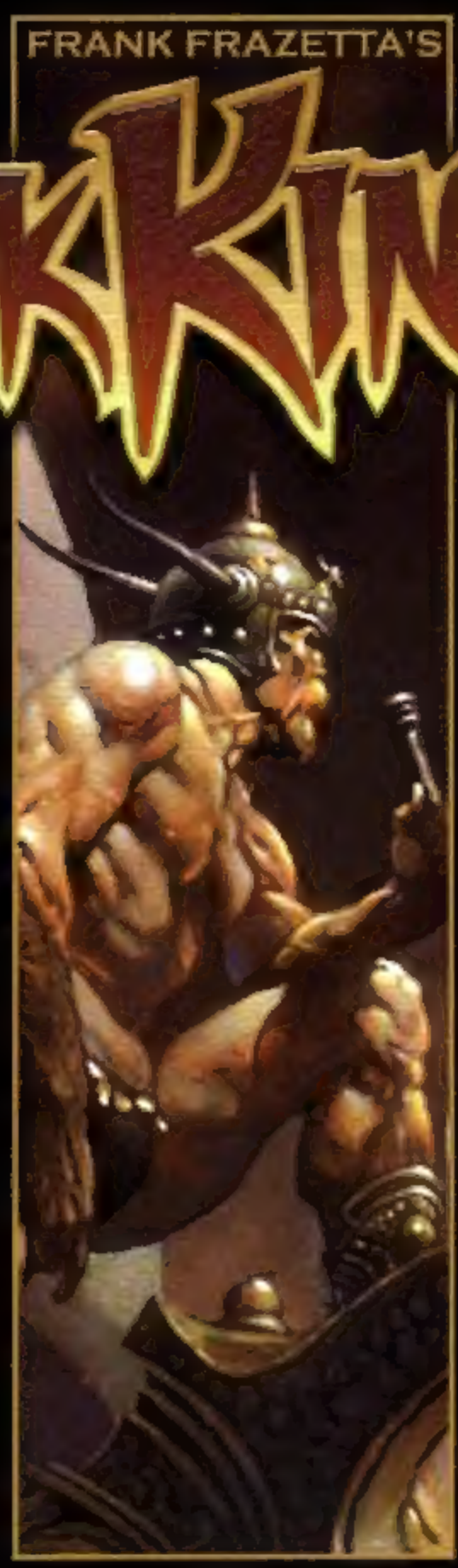

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